



SOME OF the members of the Cowan family took time out for a family portrait around 1900. (Back row) John Cowan, Clara Cowan Sampson, (front row) Margaret Cowan Vandemarr, Margaret Cowan and Florence Cowan Ginder.

## Cowan/Ginder

Early leader and area newspaper owner helped shape town and area

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Once in a while in this world of ours, there is born an individual who possesses so many qualities of leadership and strength that others can only feel awe and admiration for what these people are able to accomplish.

When you put these qualities together with the handicaps of living in the mid to late 1800s, one must conclude that if that person lived today, he would probably be a senator, governor, or president of the United States. Richard Tankersley Cowan fought in the Civil War, owned his own business and sired eight children. Then he came to La Camas. In the next decade he became a legislator, successful businessman, real estate developer, Post Master and County Commissioner. We are relating here the amazing story of Richard Cowan, but are unable to explain why his life ended in disappointment.

Also included is the story of Richard's son, John Cowan, who was a community leader in his own right, and John Ginder, who started a newspaper in Camas in 1887.

Richard Tankersley Cowan was born Jan. 15, 1834, in Lawrence County, Mo. He was the fourth of 10 children born to Campbell Cowan and Elizabeth Tankersley of Tennessee.

When Richard was 24, he married Margaret Corilla Eidson in Barry County, Mo. Margaret, the daughter of Henry Eidson and Mary Buford, was born Oct. 19, 1835, also in Missouri.

Following their marriage on Feb. 11, 1858, Richard served as a first lieutenant during the Civil War fighting for the Confederate Army. His unit was Company G, 8th Missouri Infantry (Mitchell's), and he served from 1862 through 1865.

The family moved around a bit, then Richard became the owner of a general merchandise store in Ritchey, Mo. During those years, Richard and Margaret had children, three of whom died as infants. Another Cowan child was James H. Cowan, born in 1862. He lived until he was 13, dying in 1875.

Of those surviving children, John Alexander Cowan, was born May 17, 1866, in Iron Mountain, Mo. John suffered with polio as a boy. Daughter, Florence Cowan was born April 8, 1868, also in Iron Mountain. A second daughter, Martha Ann Cowan was born April 2, 1870, in Bellevue, Mo, and finally, Clara Cowan was born in Ritchey, Mo, in Dec. 11, 1874.

In 188... Margaret decided to sell their business in Ritchey and join with the many others who were seeking their fortunes in the west. The family packed up and came west on the old OWR&N railroad on the Oregon side of the Columbia River. They then traveled by boat to the fledgling town of La Camas, Wash.

Following the pattern of Aeneas MacMaster, the area's first store owner,

Richard Cowan, who had been so successful in the "mercantile business" in Ritchey, opened a similar store in the center of La Camas. The business was called Cowan & Knapp with his partner being one of the Knapp family. Richard was a smart businessman and quickly realized the value of the forested land on the north ridges above the La Camas community. So, he wisely bought 50 acres of timbered land which became known as the "Cowan's Addition." Cowan's Addition contained 29 blocks on the first bench above town and had been surveyed in August 1884. The Addition boasted 57 inhabitants.

In 1885, the Cowans built their Classical Revival style family home "out in the country" in the middle of the Cowan addition, at 137 N.W. 14th Avenue. The house is considered "in town" today. It has two stories with four rooms on each floor as well as bath and storage areas.

During 1885 a movement was underway to build a church in the new Cowan Addition. Services for the Presbyterian Church had previously been held in MacMaster's store. Richard Cowan became a member of the building committee for the room to be St. John's Presbyterian Church, just below MacMaster's house on Division. Previously an elder in the Cumberland Presbyterian faith back in Missouri, he transferred to St. John's where he was a very active member. The lovely new church opened its doors in October of 1886.

The citizens of Clarke County and La Camas soon recognized Richard Cowan as a community leader. Only two years after arriving in La Camas, he was elected in 1886 by the people of Clarke County to serve a four-year term as county commissioner.

On Dec. 11, 1887, there was a very grand and special event in La Camas — 19-year-old Florence Edna Cowan became the bride of 30-year-old John H. Ginder. John Ginder was an experienced newspaperman, having worked for the Columbia Churchman and Vancouver Independent as a typesetter. John was from strong pioneer stock, born in 1857 on William Ginder's donation land claim at the mouth of the Lewis River. He was one of six children born to William who was a farmer, and his second wife, Louisa Powers. William Ginder later became a judge in Vancouver and the family attained quite a prominent status. John and Florence met and fell in love while on a river boat excursion up the Columbia River.

Wanting to settle in his bride's hometown, J.H. Ginder started the first newspaper in La Camas in 1887 which he named "The La Camas News."

However, even with widespread advertising, The La Camas News was not to be a success for John Ginder. John had been plagued with ill health and could not publish the paper on a regular basis. The La Camas News went out of business in 1892 and the Ginders moved to Stevenson.

While still serving as Clarke County Commissioner, Richard Cowan was appointed La Camas Post Master in 1888. Enjoying his new political appointment, Cowan decided to run for state office. He was elected to the third Washington State Legislature in 1893. In the resume he wrote for the Legislative Manual of Washington, Richard leaves the years of 1862-1865 blank. Those were the years he served in the Confederate Army. When he ran for office his opposition made note of his Confederate service.

Richard Cowan's picture still hangs with other early legislators at the Capitol building at Olympia.

Daughter Martha Ann Cowan married F.J. Vandemarr in 1893 and moved to Portland.

Although Richard Cowan was tremendously successful as a politician, he went through a period of hard times financially, suffering great losses during the depression of 1893-1895, but had the stamina and means to recover. Although one of Camas' earliest pioneers, Richard became discouraged with hard life in Clark County, and

returned home to Missouri, leaving Margaret and the rest of the family behind. The children were grown and it was to be a temporary arrangement. In Barry County, Mo, he joined in a partnership with another general merchandise store.

In 1898, three years after leaving Camas, Richard Cowan died alone at Bowers Mill, Mo. He had never returned to the west. When Margaret Cowan made the decision to stay in Camas, she did not realize it would be a final parting with her famous

pioneer husband.

Margaret sold the house on 14th Avenue shortly after Richard returned to Missouri. The new owners of the stately Cowan house were Walter and Julia Marchbank. Walter was a successful businessman who owned the livery stable and delivery service in town and went on to become a county commissioner.

John and Clara accompanied their mother to her new home on Northeast Fifth Avenue. However it was painful for Margaret to move from the home Richard had built, the home she loved so deeply. Her feelings were expressed in a letter to a cousin written by Margaret on July 4, 1897. She writes: "I was up the hill to church today. I don't get up often it is such a climb for me though it seems to get on the hill occasionally. I was up to Mrs. Mitchell once since you left that is. The closest I have been to the old house. I don't care to see it, it makes me feel lonely."

Margaret Cowan died June 11, 1908, at the age of 72. Her remains were buried in the Camas Cemetery.

The baby of the family, Clara Cowan, remained single until she was 34. She had grown up an adventurous girl and traveled to Alaska in the early 1900s to open a bake shop. She loved books, especially poetry, one of her favorite poets was Tennyson. While still in her 20s, she worked at Rose Roffler Farrell's hat shop with Anna Roffler Eddy. On Nov. 5, 1908, five months after her mother's death, Clara married Thomas Sanford Sampson. Tom Sampson owned the shoe shop to the left of Cowan's Cigar Store. Their only son, Willard (Bill) Sampson followed in his Uncle John's footsteps by becoming the mayor of Camas in 1966. He served in that post for many years, and was responsible for the new city hall among other noteworthy achievements.

John A. Cowan had been educated in Missouri. When the Cowan family arrived in Camas, John had no trouble getting employment at the paper mill. He also had connections with the lumber business. From 1888 to 1895 he invested financially and shared in the profits of the company store. In 1895 he was appointed Post Master by the Cleveland Administration and also ran a cigar and confectionery store. Then, for about a year, he became a steward on the Columbia River boat, lone. In 1899, tired of the boating life, he established "The Old Pioneer Cigar Store" in the old McKever Building at Fourth and Adams with a billiard room and fruit store in connection.

In 1909 he bought a lot and constructed a new store at 216 N.E. Fourth (present site of Robeno's Deli). The store was a favorite hangout for the men of the town. It featured a bar with a brass rail, pool, the finest of cigars, two large round candy jars by the front door (for the kids waiting for their dads outside) and an outdoor privy just beyond the back door.

John Cowan became the second mayor of Camas from 1909 to 1911, an honor indeed.

In 1917, when he was 51, John Cowan married for the first time. His bride was his childhood sweetheart, Lulu Sanders of Missouri. Lulu had a daughter by a previous marriage, Lena Privet (Mrs. Andrew Moore). By 1919, John and Lulu were settled down in a home that John built at the foot of Onusta Street (now Garfield), next to the railroad.

Lulu Cowan was a traveler and often took exciting trips away from Camas. Although John Cowan stayed home to run the store, he gave Lulu every encouragement to travel at will.

The years went by and the Ginder children fondly recall John and Lulu Cowan's visits at family gatherings. Lulu would play the piano in the living room and played beautifully without using sheet music. At the family get-togethers, John would always remember to bring bricks of ice cream from the store. The ice cream would be cut into slices for the children. A real treat.